

Cultural Education – A Key to Winning the Global War on Terrorism

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Cultural Education – A Key to Winning
the Global War on Terrorism

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to

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"Know the culture and the issues. We must know who the decision makers are. We must know how the involved parties think. We cannot impose our cultural values on people with their own culture."

- General Anthony Zinni, USMC(Ret)

Because the Marine Corps does not include mandatory cultural education for its officer corps, it fails to train its officers effectively for success in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Culture is defined as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group."ⁱ Marine officers who are responsible for conducting military operations other than war (MOOTW) and stability and support operations (SASO) in the GWOT must not only have a firm grasp on Marine Corps doctrine, but they must also understand the cultural dynamics of the people they are working with. In order to remain viable in the Global War on Terrorism, the Marine Corps must generate institutional change in its officers' professional education by creating a mandatory cultural education program (CEP) for its officers that is based on continuous professional military education.

Obligatory "Country Briefs" are not Enough

Traditional predeployment "country briefs" or "threat briefs" fall short of the current needs that Marine officers have for understanding the cultures that they will encounter in the GWOT. Deploying units are hard pressed to ensure all personnel are administratively and operationally ready to deploy overseas. Mixed in amongst shot calls, safety briefs, wills and powers of attorney, and normal combat/MOS training, unit intelligence personnel give basic classes on cultural taboos,

enemy tactics, and issue language cards with basic, useful phrases. Aside from these standard briefs, the Marine Corps does not provide its officers any additional training on the cultural dynamics of the country where they are deploying.

These traditional briefs have served their purpose for many years and certainly have some value. Since Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) I and II and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Marine Corps has taken great strides in preparing deploying units for fighting the GWOT. The stability and support operations (SASO) package at March Air Force Base is a force multiplier for deploying units. The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory published some lessons learned in the July 2004 publication of the SASO X-File, but the publication is too nearsighted. The handbook dedicates less than one page to cultural issues. In that one section, it says that "Entry Control Point sentries have to be culturally aware to be most effective at promoting your message, and gathering intel."ⁱⁱ Sentries on post do need to be "culturally aware," and improved X-files publications should explain how to incorporate cultural education into SASO training packages.

SASO training and threat briefs are both viable, and effective, but the Marine Corps needs to begin to look ahead to the future. Between the two world wars, Marine officers were required to study Spanish because at that time many were

expected to make several deployments to South American countries.ⁱⁱⁱ In another historical example, Marines of the successful combined action platoons received training that included, "personal response [classes] to the Vietnamese people, including appreciation for the religions, customs and mannerisms, [as well as] an introduction to the Vietnamese language."^{iv} This type of cultural training has proven successful in the past, and can prove successful again with a significant institutional change.

This New War Demands a Change

Few military or political professionals feel the GWOT will end soon.^v Many analysts feel a shift toward a "fourth generation"^{vi} of protracted asymmetrical warfare will change how the U.S. and western countries fight. Active duty Marines returning from service in OIF, and other professionals have begun to address the need for increased cultural training. Recent articles in the Marine Corps Gazette demonstrate this fact:

June, 2004: "Failing to improve the Corps' current cultural awareness will arguably prove to be a critical vulnerability for U.S. forces."^{vii} *Major Patrick Carroll, while serving at the CPA in Baghdad*

September, 2004: "Read more than field manuals. Understand the local culture, political history, and the basics to managing a successful government...Our epiphany was discovering just how far down that linkage goes and just how politically astute our 'strategic corporals' must

be."^{viii} *Col Christopher Conlin, USMC CO, 1st Bn, 7th Mar during OIF I*

November, 2004: "[In the April 2004 battle of Fallujah] the emphasis on cultural intelligence paid off at all levels, from negotiations that included tribal leaders and sheiks to actions by strategic corporals on the ground."^{ix} *Col Anderson, USMC(Ret) - first director of the Center for Emerging Threats*

December, 2004: "I discovered that I relied heavily on my interpersonal skills and knowledge of the culture rather than any technique or procedure."^x *1stLt Tsirilis, Communications Officer, 2nd Bn, 5th Mar during OIF II*

January, 2005: "Insurgency and regional studies (language, history, religion, and culture) have long been neglected areas of military expertise...this ignorance has proven costly time and again, and our ability to understand the forces that motivate the enemy will have a direct bearing on our success in the continuing struggle."^{xi} *LtCol Arthur Clark, USMCR serving with U.S. CENTCOM*

The quote by General Zinni at the beginning of this article highlights the need for increased cultural understanding to have success in the GWOT. William Lind's 1989 article in the Marine Corps Gazette describes a type of warfare that the U.S. Military will face and highlighted its cultural implications:

"[The] fourth [key to success in fourth generation wars] is a goal of collapsing the enemy internally rather than physically destroying him. Targets will include such things as the population's support for the war and the enemy's culture. Correct identification of enemy strategic centers of gravity will be highly important."^{xii}

He went further to say, "Primary challenges facing commanders at all levels will include target selection (which will be a political and cultural, not just a military, decision)."^{xiii} The

need for cultural understanding is recognized at many levels by many professionals from varying organizations. Marine officers fighting in the GWOT and future fourth generation wars must understand the cultural and civil military aspects of the GWOT, appreciate the impact of a military presence in a foreign country, and know how to build common ground with a populace. This can only be accomplished through a more deliberate, institutionally led emphasis on cultural understanding.

A Template for Change

Cultural education is not a new concept. There are numerous programs designed to prepare individuals for living and working in other countries and cultures. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) trains its foreign service officers for overseas assignments. The Naval Postgraduate School, which trains the Department of Defense's foreign and regional area officers, helps graduates "understand major political systems, historical background, political culture, and prevalent political ideologies and their impact on regional security, as well as the influence of ethnic, cultural, and religious values on security situations."^{xiv} Agencies from the Peace Corps to missionary organizations spend a large amount of resources to prepare their employees to succeed in different cultures.

The Marine Corps, as a warfighting organization, can never trade live-fire for lectures; however, the Marine Corps can create a Cultural Education Program (CEP) for its officers with the following considerations:

1. CEP should be based on existing models: i.e. FSI, NPS
2. Develop a program that cooperates with existing educational institutions
3. The program must focus on the study of the historical, ideological, religious, and linguistic aspects of culture.

A Cultural Education Program Model:

Creating a CEP will require an institutional change in the amount of emphasis the Marine Corps places on non-doctrinal studies. To make this change, the Marine Corps has two options. The first is to create a multi-phased, non-resident CEP package that all officers are required to complete during their careers. Officer would be assigned a specific culture or region that they would study during their career.^{xv} Each officer would get that assignment upon completion of The Basic School and would be issued their CEP at that time. The CEP would require officers to maintain Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT)^{xvi} score of 1/1/1 which would be tested every four years. The CEP has many possibilities including options for gaining CEP credit by participating in exchange tours or other overseas tours like

Marine Security Guard duty. The program could be tailored to fit the needs of the Marine Corps and its officer corps.

The CEP package should have the following objectives:

1. Learn the historical precedent for the current cultural climate in a specific country/region.
2. Understand how ideology and religion impact political and social institutions.
3. Understand a culture's social norms, group dynamics, and inter-personal interactions.
4. Understand a country's role in current world affairs
5. Develop a basic skill in the language of a specific country/culture.

The above objectives can be accomplished by reading selected texts on the subject, by completing a self-paced study using language training aids, and by following a curriculum developed to focus the objectives of each CEP package. The following chart outlines what a CEP package for the Middle East could look like. The texts listed are a mix of books that the author has used and/or were most recently mentioned in LtCol Clark's article in January's Marine Corps Gazette. The list is just an example of the types of texts that would be useful for a CEP. A thorough curriculum development process could help identify texts more relevant to certain CEPs. The prices listed simply illustrate the cost of materials in each package, but do not encompass other costs related to curriculum development and program management.

Phase 1	Cost
Arab Culture	
<i>The Arab Mind - Raphael Patai</i>	\$11.53
Political/Religious history of the Middle East	
<i>The Middle East - Bernard Lewis</i>	\$10.88
<i>America and Political Islam: Fawaz A. Gerges</i>	\$19.99
World Affairs and Current Events	
<i>Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind - Walter Reich</i>	\$18.95
Subscription to <i>Foreign Affairs</i> (4 years)	\$240.00
Religion	
<i>Understanding the Koran: A Quick Christian Guide to the Muslim Holy Book - Mateen Elaas</i>	\$9.74
<i>The Koran Interpreted - A.J. Arberry</i>	\$13.60
Language	
Arabic I (Pimsleur lessons 1-15)*	\$179.00
Phase 2	
Arab Culture	
<i>The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq : Falah A. Jabar</i>	\$24.95
Political/Religious Issues	
<i>From Beirut to Jerusalem - Thomas Friedman</i>	\$11.16
<i>What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East - Bernard Lewis</i>	\$9.71
World Affairs and Current Events	
Subscription to <i>Foreign Affairs</i>	\$0.00
Religion	
<i>The Koran Interpreted - A.J. Arberry</i>	\$0.00
Language	
Arabic II (Pimsleur lessons 16-30)*	\$0.00
Total	\$549.51

* Pimsleur Comprehensive Arabic on CD (30 lessons)

Each Phase would necessarily include course guide, study guide and applicable tests as developed by MCI

Table 1 - Sample Middle East/North Africa CEP curriculum

The second option the Marine Corps has for creating a CEP program for its officer corps is to initiate a cooperative with an existing on-line education program. The Department of Defense has existing relationships with universities that teach classes on various bases and stations and could extend that

relationship to include on-line programs. For example, Troy State University, which has campuses on several bases, has a fully accredited on-line graduate degree program in National Security Affairs.^{xvii} Aspects of Troy State's degree program could be used to create a program for Marine officers.

The Marine Corps would have to address some fiscal, contractual, and administrative related to initiating an online study program for every officer; however, on-line education is growing and improving every year and expertise in generating a program for the Marine Corps would not be difficult to obtain. This type of cooperative would allow officers to enroll in specified on-line classes throughout their career in order to meet the requirements of the CEP.

Too Many Mission Essential Tasks, Not Enough Time

One argument against increasing cultural training is that units simply do not have enough time to conduct any additional training. All Marine units have mission essential tasks that they must perform to standard. Just answering the requirements for those tasks consumes all of a unit's available training time. There are often annual and semi-annual training requirements that go unfulfilled because of a lack of training time. A lack of training time will continue to be a problem that plagues Marine units, but the CEP for officers has two

inherent benefits that can improve cultural training without adding to the problem.

First, by increasing officers' knowledge and experience with a culture, officers will have the ability to incorporate cultural aspects into normal training events. CEP trained officers can incorporate classes, scenarios, briefs and other events for their Marines without needing to arrange for briefs from their units' intelligence officers or from outside subject matter experts (SME). Because a unit will have officers enrolled in CEPs for different cultures, the Marines will get exposure to several cultures throughout multiple training events. For example, a rifle company in an infantry battalion might have two platoon commanders in the Middle East/North Africa CEP, one platoon commander in the East Asia CEP, and one in the Sub-Saharan Africa CEP. Add in the company commander and the company executive officer and that one company has a wealth of knowledge of several different cultures.

The second advantage is that the bulk of CEP study is completed by officers on their own personal time. Like most non-resident professional military education (PME) officers will complete the CEP at their own pace and will test when they are ready to test. The CEP, will add to an officer's personal study requirements, however, it does not subtract from the training time the unit needs to meet its mission essential tasks. The

argument that Marine units do not have enough training time to add cultural training into their schedules is countered by the end results of the CEP. The CEP places officers with a strong level of cultural understanding at the small unit level to incorporate their knowledge into challenging and creative training.

The Cultural Imperative:

The Marine Corps is involved in a challenging and dynamic war on terrorism. To ensure success in this GWOT and other fourth generation wars that emerge, the leadership of the Corps will need an increased understanding of the cultures and countries where the GWOT is being waged. Historians and theorists from Sun Zsu to Clausewitz have espoused the need for knowledge of one's enemy. The Marine Corps is good at conducting mission analysis, identifying its enemy's tactical capabilities, and using that knowledge on the battlefield. However, with the increase in both asymmetrical warfare and cultural interaction, the Corps will increasingly fight in non-linear battlefields where its officers must understand not only the tactics, techniques, and procedures the enemy is using, but also the history, ideology, and language the enemy is using to sustain its basis of support and often its will to continue to fight.

Notes

1. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*, New ed. s.v. "culture."
2. Marine Corps X-File 3-11.11, *The Company Commander in Stability and Support Operations* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory(C 52) July 2004), 25.
3. Major Patrick Carroll, USMC, "Increasing Cultural Awareness," *Marine Corps Gazette (on line postings)*, June 2004, <<http://www.mca-marines.org/Gazette/2004/04arch.html>> (7 January 2005).
4. LtCol David H. Wagner, USMC, "A Handful of Marines," *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 1968, p. 45. <<http://capmarine.com/cap/handfull.htm>> (7 January 2005).
5. David Ignatius, "Achieving Real Victory Could Take Decades," *Washington Post (on line)*, December 2004; <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A26054-2004Dec25.html>> (31 January 2005).
6. Williams S. Lind, et al., "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989 p 22-26. <http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th_gen_war_gazette.htm> (4 January 2005). William Lind, in his 1989 Gazette article defines fourth generation warfare: "In broad terms, fourth generation warfare seems likely to be widely dispersed and largely undefined; the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point. It will be nonlinear, possibly to the point of having no definable battlefields or fronts. The distinction between "civilian" and "military" may disappear. Actions will occur concurrently throughout all participants' depth, including their society as a cultural, not just a physical, entity.
7. Carroll, 2.
8. Colonel Christopher C. Conlin, USMC, "What Do You Do for an Encore?" *Marine Corps Gazette*, September 2004, 80.
9. Colonel Gary W. Anderson, USMC(Ret), "Fallujah and the Future of Urban Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 2004, 52.
10. 1stLt Christopher S. Tsirlis, USMC, "The MAGTF Officer in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette*, December 2004, 17.

11. LtCol Arthur L. Clark, USMCR, "Of Insurgency, Arab History, and Militant Islam," *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 2005, 41.

12. Lind, 3.

13. Lind, 4.

14. Naval Post Graduate School - educational skills requirements page: <http://www.nps.navy.mil/ofcinst/esr681-684.htm> (7 January 2005).

15. Marine Corps Order 1520.11E specifies the following countries for FAO/RAO's course work and could serve as a template for CEP packages: Latin America; Former Soviet Union; People's Republic of China; Middle East/North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Southwest Asia; Western Europe; East Asia; and Eastern Europe

16. Camp Pendleton Joint Education Center Homepage - http://www.mccscamp pendleton.com/qol/lifelong_learning/joint_education_center/military_testing.html (31 January 2005). Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) - some exams are 90 minutes long and consist of two parts, others are 4 hours and 2 parts. The DLPT is used to demonstrate a proficiency in a given foreign language. The test is offered in 43 different languages. It measures proficiency in listening, reading, and speaking with 3 being the highest score in each category. For example a score of 1/1/1 would demonstrate the lowest level of proficiency in all three areas of listening, reading and speaking.

17. Troy State University Distance Learning Center, <http://www.tsulearn.net/GradPrograms/MSIR/MSIR.htm> (7 January 2005).

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<<http://capmarine.com/cap/handfull.htm>> (7 January 2005).

ⁱ Websters dictionary

ⁱⁱ X-File 3-11.11 pg 25

ⁱⁱⁱ Maj carroll's gazette article

^{iv} Marine Corps Gazette Mar68, pp. 44-46 Written by: LtCol. David H. Wagner, USMC

^v Ingastius

^{vi} William Lind, in his 1989 Gazette article defines fourth generation warfare: "In broad terms, fourth generation warfare seems likely to be widely dispersed and largely undefined; the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point. It will be nonlinear, possibly to the point of having no definable battlefields or fronts. The distinction between "civilian" and "military" may disappear. Actions will occur concurrently throughout all participants' depth, including their society as a cultural, not just a physical, entity.

^{vii} Maj Carroll's gazette article

^{viii} Gazette September p 80

^{ix} November Gazette p 52

^x Gazette September

^{xi} Gazette January p 41

^{xii} Changing Face of Warfare p. 4

^{xiii} Changing Face of Warfare p. 5

^{xiv} <http://www.nps.navy.mil/ofcinst/esr681-684.htm>

^{xv} MCO 1520.11E specifies the following countries for FAO/RAO's course work. Latin America; Former Soviet Union; People's Republic of China; Middle East/North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Southwest Asia; Western Europe; East Asia; and Eastern Europe

^{xvi} Camp Pendleton Joint Education Center Homepage -
[http://www.mccscamppendleton.com/qol/lifelong_learning/joint_education_center/military_testing.html_\(31_January_2005\).](http://www.mccscamppendleton.com/qol/lifelong_learning/joint_education_center/military_testing.html_(31_January_2005).)

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^{xvii} rE: troy state's online page